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William Waldorf Astor Spent Nearly \$12,000,000 To Obtain a Peerage

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR, the largest owner of New York real estate, has finally obtained a peerage from the King of England, after renouncing his native country, performing the most amazing series of antics ever committed by a social climber, and after paying incomparably the largest sum of money ever paid for the honor obtained.

He has chosen for himself the title "Baron Astor of Hever Castle."

For twenty-five years the largest owner of New York real estate has been assiduously cultivating the King, Government and public of Great Britain with a view to obtaining a title, and in this present period of acute national distress has he been able to satisfy his ambition.

Mr. Astor left the United States with the remark that it was "no country for a gentleman to live in." His disgust with this country was due, first, to his failure in a political campaign, and, secondly, to the freedom with which the American press commented on him. As a very young millionaire he condescended to be elected to the State Legislature.

Then he ran for Congress. In consideration of his generous contributions to the party he was nominated for a safe Republican district. Politicians enjoyed his liberality and newspaper reporters had a good deal of fun with his social pretensions, all of which annoyed Mr. Astor very much. To his disgust, he was defeated.

The party tried to console him with a term as Minister to Italy, but the ingratitude of the Republic always rankled. He returned to America, and then his dignity was still more seriously affronted. His wife, now deceased, informed the postmaster at Newport that she was "the Mrs. Astor," and that all letters so addressed were to be delivered to her. The late Mrs. William Astor, who had long been the acknowledged queen of New York society, calmly informed the postmaster that she was "the Mrs. Astor."

This peculiar controversy became the subject of much humorous comment. Few people know that this was what finally disgusted Mr. W. W. Astor with America. His dignity was more offended than if he had been Czar of Russia. After putting his financial interests in order he moved permanently to London in 1891.

One of his first acts was to lease the finest house in London, Lansdowne House, whose owner was in need of ready money. Soon after that he purchased Cliveden House, on the Thames, a beautiful house and estate, whose owner, the Duke of Westminster, although the richest peer in England, felt unable to keep it.

Then Mr. Astor plunged into a career of social conquest. Of course, he planned to win the favor of the then Prince of Wales, afterward King Edward. The Prince was very favorably disposed toward persons with large accumulations of cash, whatever their ancestry might be. Mr. Astor gave balls and entertainments which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the Prince put in appearance at one of these.

Finally he accepted an invitation to stay over night at Cliveden, a very great honor. Mr. Astor is said to have spent \$200,000 on this affair alone. He did everything with Oriental splendor, but with his customary lack of tact, he made a slip.

When entertaining royalty it is essential to find out just what they wish to do. Now, Mr. Astor planned to take the Prince in the morning for a triumphal procession on

the Thames in a glorified steam launch. Sometimes the Prince liked to lie about in the morning rather than take strenuous exercise, like riding on a boat. When he heard what Mr. Astor was going to do for him, his reply—the Prince was noted for his pungent repartee—is said to have been something like this: "What does the old bounder mean by telling me what he is going to do with me? Tell him I'm engaged and not to be disturbed."

The Prince went away from this affair seriously ruffled, and it was long before he showed Mr. Astor any favor again.

At this early period Mr. Astor purchased the Pall Mall Gazette, a paper originally intended "to be written by gentlemen for gentlemen." It had become a popular sheet under the late W. T. Stead, and then it had rapidly declined. Mr. Astor paid a great sum for it, said to have been \$1,000,000.

He made it a high Tory organ and appointed an earl's son as editor. He also established the Pall Mall Magazine, and used it in the same way to further his social ambitions.

Mr. Astor's sense of dignity and self-esteem was so great, that in spite of his desire to win favor with the nobility and ruling classes, he was constantly getting into hot water with them. He found that the earl's son on the paper had been making fun of his employer, and ignominiously discharged him. A duke's son, Lord Frederick Hamilton, on the magazine, went the same way.

Then Mr. Astor simply shocked society by kicking a distinguished British naval officer, Admiral Sir Berkeley Milne, who had been commander of the royal yacht, out of his house. An English society woman, who had received an invitation to a gorgeous musicale given by Mr. Astor, asked Admiral Milne, who had not been invited, to accompany her. When Mr. Astor found that the naval officer had come without an invitation, he ordered him out of the house.

Then he had a remarkable bickering with the late Duke of Westminster. He purchased Cliveden from the Duke, with all its furniture, but after a while the Duke claimed possession of the visitors' book, with the autographs of all the royal and noble persons who had visited the place. After long and angry correspondence and threats of law suits, Mr. Astor held on to the book, although to Englishmen it seemed a personal possession of the former owner like a batch of letters.

Mr. Astor became a naturalized British subject in 1890; and after that it was notorious that he was campaigning for a peerage. He gave millions of dollars to funds approved by the King or by Tory political and social leaders. An Englishman becomes a lord through the nomination of the Prime Minister and is formally created by the King. The King does not have a free hand in creating peerages, because they affect the legislature, but he is able to give them to a certain number of his friends. On the other hand, it would be difficult for the Government to give a peerage to a man who was obnoxious to the King.

It is well known that a common way of obtaining a peerage is to make a generous contribution to the campaign fund of the party in power. Successful English stockbrokers and manufacturers of oilcloth obtained peerages in return for contributions of \$50,000 or so, while Mr. Astor, who was spending millions, got nothing. This disappointed almost threatened his reason. The King would not

think of giving him a title, and no Government had the hardihood to propose him for one. Whatever the sum paid, there is always a pretence that the title is given for some genuine public service.

Mr. Astor's quest of a title finally became a joke in England. Weekly newspapers made cartoons on the subject. One showed him as an American eagle, loaded down with money bags, in pursuit of a vanishing coronet. Labor Members of Parliament poured scorn on this "American money-bag who was seeking to undermine our free institutions."

To increase his social splendor Mr. Astor purchased Hever Castle, near Sevenoaks, said to be the most perfect specimen of a mediæval dwelling in England. It was the birthplace of Anne Boleyn, King Henry VIII's beautiful and ill-fated wife No. 2. A funny story about this place began to go the rounds of English society, that annoyed Mr. Astor exceedingly. It was said that Anne Boleyn's ghost had always haunted the castle, but after Mr. Astor went there she declined to appear.

Perhaps the most ungraceful, and to Americans the most repulsive, thing Mr. Astor ever did was to present the flag of the American ship Chesapeake to the British United Service Museum. The ship Shannon in 1813, during a famous fight, in which the American captain, James Lawrence, uttered his immortal words, "Don't give up the ship." The flag fell into private hands in England and Mr. Astor bought it for \$4,250 and gave it to the institution named.

As Mr. Astor's children grew to maturity his social prospects in England improved. His elder son, Waldorf Astor, a presentable young man, educated at Oxford, married Mrs. Nannie Langhorne Shaw, one of the famously beautiful Langhorne sisters of Virginia. She has become very popular in the smartest English society. She helped her husband to win his election to the House of Commons for Plymouth.

The second son, John Jacob Astor, became an officer of the Life Guards, the premier regiment of the British army, and proved himself a good sportsman. He has been wounded in the present war.

The title which Mr. Astor sought so long to obtain from the Tories he has at last won from a coalition Government that is mainly Liberal.

His greatest contribution of all to British funds is to pay the present income tax, which amounts to one-third of a rich man's total income. In Mr. Astor's case this is estimated to be \$1,250,000 per annum. He could have avoided all this by transferring his residence to New York. He has also given great sums to war relief funds.

The title now conferred on Mr. Astor, that of baron, is the lowest in the peerage, but it gives him a seat in the House of Lords. It entitles him to wear a scarlet velvet robe, with two rows of ermine, and a coronet surmounted with six silver balls.

His eldest son will inherit the title, and the two sons will now be known as the Hon. Waldorf Astor and the Hon. John Jacob Astor.—Boston Evening Post.

BOSTON GRIPPED BY PNEUMONIA

BOSTON, Feb. 8.—Pneumonia caused the death of seventy persons in Boston last week and gripe eleven, showing a 10 per cent. decrease as compared with the previous week. In all, 295 deaths were reported in Boston, against 262 the same week last year. Deaths from other causes were: Measles, 2; tuberculosis, 27; whooping cough, 8; heart disease, 41; bronchitis, 10; violent, 17.

NOTICE

ALL Trinity District Assessments for the District Council should be sent to the Treasurer, MR. GEORGE FOWLOW, of Phillip, Trinity East.

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